

APR 23 1996

Cops opposed rap concert, but city allowed it

COCKERHAM, EUGENE
By Diana M. Williams
STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — Police initially denied a permit for an East Oakland rap concert this weekend, but the show went on with disastrous results after the city sanctioned the event, officials confirmed Monday.

Now two investigations are under way to determine what went wrong and whether the permit should have been granted.

Concert promoters fault Oakland police, saying their patrol was ineffectual and, at times, antagonistic.

Citing the promoter's past history of unruly concerts, Oakland police blame the city, saying the show's permit should never have been granted.

Others point the finger at slow security guards and poor planning.

"Very little is known so far about what spurred this," said Larry Carroll, Oakland's administrative hearing officer.

Carroll on Monday defended his decision to overrule the police department's warnings and grant the permit. The size of the concert hall was adequate for the show, he said, and promoters agreed to pay for extra security.

But something went awry. An estimated 5,000 young people crammed into Eastmont Mall's parking lot and surrounding streets Saturday night as they waited to hear the popular rap group Dogg Pound. Having paid between \$20 and \$30 for their tickets, many were aggravated by a

series of delays. Security guards pat-searched concertgoers, offending many, and technical problems inside the hall delayed the show's start for more than an hour.

"They were searching these people like they were going into a jail, you know what I'm saying?" said Miguel Flores, events coordinator for the mall's pavilion, where the concert was held. "There were less than 1,500 people inside and easily 3,000 outside. People just got disgusted."

By 10:30 p.m., police were pushing back impatient partiers, who retaliated by hurling bottles and rocks. The pavilion's glass doors were bashed in, buses and automobiles vandalized, and some motorists attacked in their cars, police said. Several

women reported having their clothing ripped off, while mall neighbors reported hearing screeching cars and gunshots as late as 3 a.m. Sunday.

"It wasn't a show anymore, it was a war zone," said Charles E. Johnson III, known as "Chuck" on Soul Beat Television's popular rap show.

The concert went on, ending about 1:45 a.m., but promoter Eugene Cockerham agreed that what police predicted would happen did happen.

He and others, however, attribute the real problem to a larger issue: Underlying tension between police and the young, mostly African-American crowds attracted

Please see Rap, A-7

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to events like rap concerts.

"If you want to point a blunt finger, this is society's fault," said Johnson. "People spend \$200 or \$300 on their outfits, they're paying \$25 to get into the concert and then police come along and start pushing them. People start laughin' at them and they get mad. You've got to look at the psychology of this."

Cockerham lauded Carroll Monday for letting the concert take place.

"Larry Carroll addressed the need for the youngsters of Oakland to have a place to go, and we love him for that," he said. "On Monday he decided

Carroll said Monday he decided the city's commitment to providing entertainment for young people, coupled with the promoters' security measures, outweighed police trepidation about the concert.

the concert. There were about 73 police and security guards at the show, more than is typically required for such concerts, Carroll said. Cockerham spent close to \$10,000 for 23 off-duty police officers to control crowds in the parking lot and nearby streets. He also hired 30 security guards for inside from the Intervention Agency and another 20 from the Nation of Islam.

Cockerham and neighbors said the off-duty police stood around and did not attempt to control the crowds, even when violence broke out.

Oakland police Lt. Larry Eade admitted Monday his 23 officers were badly outnumbered at first. He said eventually more than 60 police were called to the scene, which he described as one of the worst disturbances he has witnessed.

"There is not much prevention you can do with 20 cops and a couple of thousand people," Eade said. Officers could not divert concert-goers "because the group we would have encountered was too violent and superior in numbers."

People who came to the event to cruise and do "side shows" with their cars — donuts or wheelies — caused much of the problem, he said.

Much of it was captured on a

video tape filmed by a police evidence technician. Eade said film equipment was there because "we had a feeling there could be a problem," based on the normal weekend activity in the area and because of the "history of the promoters."

noters." Police denied the permit for Saturday's concert based on Cockerham's history with Fruitvale's Club Faces. Its cabaret license was revoked in January because of neighborhood complaints about noise. Police also were concerned about two other controversial dances Cockerham staged in San Leandro, which police there said ended in "riots."

"We will be denying this permit," Oakland police Lt. Ned Ubben wrote to Carroll on April 10, "and are requesting that if an appeal is placed with the City Manager's Office, that it also be denied."

Cockerham said he was a consultant to Club Faces, not its promoter, and the owner was responsible for problems there. He disputed the severity of the San Leandro problems at dances in July and February, saying the car "side shows" then seemed unruly by San Leandro standards and commonplace in Oakland.

"Me and Mr. Ubben didn't see eye to eye," Cockerham said. "I'm not racist, but he's a middle-aged white person sitting there trying to control people having a good time. They need to sit down and help us get a warehouse because as long as you have groups like the Dogg Pound putting out tapes, people are going to want to hear them play. It's not going to go away."

In overturning the police department's decision, Carroll noted that Cockerham had already paid more than \$10,000 to Dogg Pound, believing his permit would be granted.

Two young men were killed in a traffic accident about a mile and a half from the concert early Sunday. Police are investigating whether the men were coming from the concert.

Staff Writers Harry Harris, Chauncey Bailey and Matt Carter contributed to this report.